

FACT SHEET - Status of Snow Geese, Atlantic Brant and Swan, 2005

- Habitat conditions were good to above average in the western and central arctic with early snow melt leading to good production. Conditions in the eastern arctic, where Atlantic Brant and Greater snow geese breed, were fair to poor, and production is expected to be below average for these species.
- **Greater Snow Geese.** Surveys conducted this past winter and spring recorded 814,600 geese, a slight decrease from last year, but there has been a 2% increase in the breeding population since 1996. Similarly, the Mid-winter index for snow geese in the Atlantic Flyway has increased by 5% annually during the same period. Production is expected to be fair to poor this year due to late spring conditions in the high eastern arctic.
- Liberal hunting seasons, and a special spring conservation hunt in eastern Canada, have resulted in higher harvests during the past four years. However, there are still a lot of birds in this population, and hunting seasons will remain liberal because of continued concern about the detrimental impacts these birds are having on breeding and wintering habitats.
- Current hunting regulations for snow geese are as liberal as Federal Frameworks will allow and include a 107-day season that runs from November to March, with a bag limit of 15 geese. Despite these regulations, it has been difficult to increase snow goose harvests to desired levels. Behavioral habits of these birds make them difficult to decoy, and hunters have had limited success.
- An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is being prepared that will address alternative management strategies (unplugged shotguns, electronic calls, shooting to ½ hour after sunset) to increase the harvest of Greater snow geese in the Atlantic Flyway.
- Mid-continent lesser snow geese are at even higher densities than our Greater Snows, and have caused extensive damage to their central arctic breeding grounds. Regulations for these birds in the Mississippi and Central Flyways were liberalized 5 years ago to include a spring hunt, and the use of electronic calls and unplugged shotguns.
- **Brant.** The Atlantic Brant winter index (123,248) decreased 5% from last year. Brant numbers are below average, and a reduction in the framework from a liberal to a moderate season has been proposed. Production is expected to be below average and the fall flight is expected to be lower than last year.
- **Tundra Swans.** Swan production is expected to be average this year. The winter count in the Atlantic Flyway (68,735) decreased 38% from last year, however, the tundra swan population remains fairly stable and is within the goals of the Tundra Swan Management Plan. The tundra swan hunting season in Virginia is authorized and conducted as specified in the Tundra Swan Management Plan and Hunt Plan, and frameworks have remained the same as last year.